

# SPECIFICATION

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## **SPACE CARVING FOR MEASUREMENT OF HIGH- CURVATURE AREAS ON A MECHANICAL PART**

### Background of Invention

[0001] The present invention is directed to light gauging techniques for locating the leading edge of part such as turbine blade having a complex part shape. Accurately identifying the contour of the leading edge is important because many performance characteristics of the blade are determined by the shape of its leading edge. However, because of the complexity of the blades contour obtaining accurate measurements can be both difficult and time consuming. For example, it possible to hard gauge the contour of the blade using touch probes and other contact instruments. This, however, is time consuming and adds substantial cost to a production line process:

[0002] An alternative testing method involves light gauging techniques. For example, it is possible to measure the shape of an object by mounting it on a fixture and illuminating it with a structured laser light. That is, a laser light is directed at the surface of the object and a pattern of light stripes are produced which extend across the surface of the object generally parallel to each other. The path of the stripes varies in accordance with the shape features of the part. By rotating the part, a series of images can be obtained and processed using appropriate algorithms employing known triangulation techniques. Processing of the images allows the points to be located in three dimensional (3D) space.

[0003] If the part has relatively flat contours, or if curvatures in the contours are not very pronounced, the above procedure works well. However, for an airfoil such as a turbine

blade, the shape of its leading edge is relatively complex and it has been found that it is difficult to accurately define the leading edge shape using the above described technique. A technique known as "space carving" has heretofore been used to create realistic 3D models from real objects. See, for example, *Automatic 3D Model Construction for Turn-Table Sequences*, Fitzgibbon et al., Robotics Research Group, Department of Engineering Science, University of Oxford (publication date). While the previous usage of space carving techniques has been the replication of whole objects, the present invention is directed not at replicating the overall shape of a turbine blade, rather at accurately determining only the shape of the leading edge so that accurate comparisons between the blade's contour and a set of acceptance criteria for the part.

## Summary of Invention

[0004] Briefly stated, the present invention is directed to determining the contour of the leading edge of a part such as a turbine blade having a complex part shape. The part is mounted on a fixture and a camera located a known distance from the object is used to obtain an image of the object. The object is backlit so the outer contour of the object occludes a portion of the light and a silhouette of the part is created. Next, the object is rotated and a new image is obtained with a different part silhouette. This process is repeated until a sufficient number of images are acquired. The images are now processed using space carving techniques so the contour of the leading edge of the part is defined.

[0005] In an alternate embodiment, the blade is mounted on a fixture with a number of cameras located known distances from the part at defined orientations with respect to the part. The part is again backlit. An image of the blade is obtained from each camera. The images are processed using space carving techniques to obtain a contour of the leading edge of the part.

[0006] The foregoing and other objects, features, and advantages of the invention as well as presently preferred embodiments thereof will become more apparent from the reading of the following description in connection with the accompanying drawings.

## Brief Description of Drawings

- [0007] In the accompanying drawings which form part of the specification:
- [0008] Fig. 1 is a representation of an object such as an airfoil having a complex part contour and the shape of whose leading edge is to be determined; and,
- [0009] Figs. 2 illustrates a test setup for obtaining images of the airfoil for processing using space carving techniques to determine the shape of the leading edge; and,
- [0010] Figs. 3A-3C illustrate respective contours obtained of the image when backlit by a light source.
- [0011] Corresponding reference numerals indicate corresponding parts throughout the several figures of the drawings.

### Detailed Description

- [0012] The following detailed description illustrates the invention by way of example and not by way of limitation. The description clearly enables one skilled in the art to make and use the invention, describes several embodiments, adaptations, variations, alternatives, and uses of the invention, including what is presently believed to be the best mode of carrying out the invention.

- [0013] Referring to Fig. 1, a part P such as a turbine blade or airfoil is mounted on a fixture B. The airfoil has a complex three-dimensional part shape. When in use, performance characteristics of the blade are significantly determined by the contour of a leading edge E of the airfoil. As previously noted, the contour of the leading edge can be accurately determined using hard gauging techniques, but this costly and time consuming. Accordingly, use of a light gauging technique, particularly space carving, in accordance with the present invention provides a rapid method of accurately acquiring dimensional information about the part. Once this information is obtained, it is compared against that for a model of the part to determine whether the part is acceptable or must be rejected.

- [0014] In accordance with the method of the invention, the airfoil is backlit by a light source S. The source projects light rays which produce a visual cone C of light. The outer contour T (see Fig. 3A) of part P occludes a portion of the projected light if viewed from the opposite, front side of the airfoil. If the part is viewed from different

viewing angles, a series of occluded images can be made. By processing these images using a space carving algorithm, in accordance with the invention, an accurate approximation of the leading edge of the part can be developed. By then comparing the resulting leading edge values with those for a parametric model of the part, acceptability of the airfoil is readily determined.

[0015] Referring to Fig. 2, part P is, as noted, mounted on a fixture B, which is preferably a movable fixture by which the airfoil can be placed in a desired orientation. Light source S is placed on one side of the part, and an imaging means I is placed on the opposite side of the part so the part is between the light source and imaging means. As result, the part blocks a portion of the light emanating from the source, and the occluded light produces the outline or contour T of the part. With the arrangement shown in Fig. 2, a first image of the part is obtained by imaging means I which is preferably a camera operating in the visual portion of the light spectrum. This is the image shown in Fig. 3A. The image is supplied to a processor R for processing and analysis.

[0016] After the first image is obtained, fixture B is moved to position the part in a second preferred orientation. When in this new position, a new image of the part is taken by the imaging means. Because the part has been moved, a new contour, indicated T' in Fig. 3B is captured by the camera and provided to processor R for imaging. Fixture B is again moved to position the part in another preferred orientation, and another image of the backlit part is captured by the imaging means. This image shows yet another contour T" as indicated in Fig. 3C. This third image is also directed to processor R for processing.

[0017] The above steps are repeated until a sufficient number of images are obtained for processing so that the leading edge E of the part can be adequately defined using the space carving algorithm employed by processor R. Typically, three images are the minimum number sufficient for this purpose; although, 6-7, or up to 10 images may be required depending upon the complexity of the contour of the leading edge. Once the requisite number of images is obtained, processor R will produce a resultant image which is an accurate representation of the part's leading edge E which is then used for part acceptance purposes. Since acceptance leading edge characteristics of

the part can be conveniently stored in the processor, the processor can make the acceptance determination as part of its image processing.

[0018] Referring again to Fig. 2, an alternate embodiment of the method of the present invention is also shown. Now, instead of one camera, imaging means I includes a plurality of cameras such as the three cameras shown in the Fig. (one solid line, and two in phantom). Each camera is generally positioned on the same side of the object (i.e, on the opposite side from the light source) with respect to part P so to have a defined orientation with respect to the part. Now, each camera captures a separate image of the part, which, for example, corresponds to the representations shown in Figs. 3A-3C. The images are each supplied to processor R for processing in accordance with the space carving algorithm employed by the processor.

[0019] While three cameras I are shown in Fig. 2, as previously noted with to the number of images needed to obtain an accurate representation of the leading edge of the part, imaging means I may employ additional cameras. Each camera is positioned with respect to the part so to capture an appropriate image for processing.

[0020] Finally, it is a feature of the invention for processor R to retain the leading edge information developed for each part tested. This information can then be used to perform statistical analyses or provide other information useful in the design, manufacturing, and testing of the part.

[0021] In view of the above, it will be seen that the several objects of the invention are achieved and other advantageous results are obtained. As various changes could be made in the above constructions without departing from the scope of the invention, it is intended that all matter contained in the above description or shown in the accompanying drawings shall be interpreted as illustrative and not in a limiting sense.